INFORMATION ON DEFENSIVE GUN USES

KLECK STUDY

In a 1992 survey, Gary Kleck, a Florida State University criminologist, found that there are 2.5 million defensive gun uses (DGU's) per year by “law-abiding” citizens in the United States. Another study from the same period, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), estimated 65,000 DGUs annually. The NCVS survey differed from Kleck’s study in that it only interviewed those who reported a threatened, attempted, or completed victimization for one of six crimes: rape, robbery, assault, burglary, non-business larceny, and motor vehicle theft. That accounts for the discrepancy in the two results. A National Research Council report said that Kleck's estimates appeared to be exaggerated and that it was almost certain that "some of what respondents designate[d] as their own self-defense would be construed as aggression by others" (Understanding and Preventing Violence, 266, Albert J. Reiss, Jr. & Jeffrey A. Roth, eds., 1992).

The 2.5 million figure would lead us to conclude that, in a serious crime, the victim is three to four times more likely than the offender to have and use a gun. Although the criminal determines when and where a crime occurs, although pro-gun advocates claim that criminals can always get guns, although few potential victims carry guns away from home, the criminal, according to Kleck’s survey, is usually outgunned by the individual he is trying to assault, burglarize, rob or rape.

Kleck’s survey also included gun uses against animals and did not distinguish civilian uses from military of police uses. Kleck’s Interviewers do not appear to have questioned a random individual at a given telephone number, but rather asked to speak to the male head of the household. Males from the South and West were oversampled. The results imply that many hundreds of thousands of murders should have been occurring when a private gun was not available for protection. Yet guns are rarely carried, less than a third of adult Americans personally own guns, and only 27,000 homicides occurred in 1992.

HEMENWAY CRITICISM OF KLECK

“Since a small percentage of people may report virtually anything on a telephone survey, there are serious risks of overestimation in using such surveys to measure rare events. The problem becomes particularly severe when the issue has even a remote possibility of positive social desirability response bias.

Consider the responses to a national random-digit-dial telephone survey of over 1,500 adults conducted in May 1994 by ABC News and the Washington Post. One question asked: "Have you yourself ever seen anything that you believe was a spacecraft from another planet?" 10% of respondents answered in the affirmative. These 150 individuals were then asked, "Have you personally ever been in contact with aliens from another planet or not?" and 6% answered "Yes."

By extrapolating to the national population, we might conclude that almost 20 million Americans have seen spacecraft from another planet, and over a million have been in personal contact with aliens from other planets. That more than a million Americans had contact with

Phoca PDF

aliens would be incredible news—but not the kind actively publicized by reputable scientists. Yet the ABC News/Washington Post data on aliens are as good as or better than that from any of the thirteen surveys cited by K-G as supporting their conclusions about self-defense gun use."
http://www.saf.org/LawReviews/Hemenway1.htm

STUDIES SHOWING RISK OF GUNS OUTWEIGH BENEFITS

"Given the number of victims allegedly being saved with guns, it would seem natural to conclude that owning a gun substantially reduces your chances of being murdered. Yet a careful case-control study of homicide in the home found that a gun in the home was associated with an increased rather than a reduced risk of homicide. Virtually all of this risk involved homicide by a family member or intimate acquaintance."

- Arthur L. Kellermann et al., Gun Ownership As a Risk Factor for Homicide in the Home, 329 New Eng. J. Med. 1084, 1087 (1993)

In 1997, Cummings and colleagues at the University of Washington reported that the legal purchase of a handgun was associated with a long-lasting increased risk of violent death.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE STUDIES CONCERNING DEFENSIVE GUN USES

DOJ study reported 83,000 annual defensive gun uses from 1987-1992. During same period, there were more than 135,000 total gun deaths and injuries in the U.S. annually.
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/ascii/hvfsdaft.txt

As for the notion that those using firearms to fend off attackers were more effective in avoiding injury than those using other weapons or no weapons, the DOJ study makes the following exclaimer: "Care should be used in interpreting these data because many aspects of crimes--including victim and offender characteristics, crime circumstances, and offender intent--contribute to victims' injury outcomes."

What is also interesting is that the study notes that "In most cases victims who used firearms to defend themselves or their property were confronted by offenders who were either unarmed or armed with weapons other than firearms." Specifically, only 35% of those who used a firearm in self-defense actually faced an offender who had a gun. DOJ makes no judgments in this study on whether the level of force employed by these individuals was appropriate or consonant with the threat they faced. It may very well be that the presence of firearms in many of these incidents escalated what otherwise might have been non-violent (or non-fatal) encounters.

According to the DOJ study, gun owners also provided criminals with ample opportunities to arm themselves through firearm theft: "From 1987-1992 victims reported an annual average of about 341,000 incidents of firearm theft. Because the NCVS asks for types but not a count of items stolen, the annual total of firearms stolen probably exceeds the number of incidents." It should also be noted that there is no federal law requiring the reporting of lost and stolen firearms, and almost no state laws in this regard. There are undoubtedly thousands of stolen firearms that go entirely unreported every year.

Phoca PDF